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18 July 77
A23
WASHINGTON POST

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Intelligence Signals: A Defeat for Turner

Rejection by President Carter of CIA Director Stansfield Turner's bid for control over the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), one of the nation's most important spy agencies, signals at least temporary decline in Turner's soaring bureaucratic power.

That rejection, not yet announced, was decided on late last week when Defense Secretary Harold Brown and the military high command convinced top White House aides that the Pentagon must retain control over NRO's espionage activities. These include such essential spying operations as picture-taking from high altitudes by satellites and U-2-type aircraft, sampling air particles and intercepting communications.

A compromise has been pieced together, at Brown's suggestion, that will give Turner partial control over NRO's budget. But as one of the President's chief advisers told us, "Not even Stan Turner could pry NRO away from the military. It's the life-blood of their war planning."

The battle swirling around President Carter involves NRO and other parts of the pending intelligence reorganization, embodied in options called Presidential Review Memorandum No. 11. There has been no fiercer struggle in the young Carter administration. Memorandum No. 11 went to Carter on July 13, with strong indications that he was leaning toward giving Turner what he wanted: overall control of NRO, with power to dictate use of its "assets."

Brown's counterattack gained the backing of Budget Director Bert Lance and National Security Director Zbigniew Brzezinski. Their potency postponed the decision and then persuaded the President that, except for budgetary oversight, NRO should stay with the Air Force.

The defeat for Turner may prove temporary. Having played a major role in killing the President's widely ac-

claimed Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, Turner has powerful allies in Congress. The Senate Intelligence Committee is working on a reorganization that favors Turner's centralization plans.

Moreover, the President and the Senate committee reached informal agreement several months ago to work together in reorganizing the CIA and the entire intelligence community. The Senate committee is now leaning toward complete transfer of NRO budget and operational authority from the Pentagon to the Director of Intelligence.

Nevertheless, Turner's rapid escalation in a brief four months to become a Carter confidant has been slowed, a political fact transcending the battle over control of NRO. A part of that deceleration was bad staff work inside Turner's office, which trapped him in an embarrassing mistake last week that the Pentagon has been at pains to point out.

The General Accounting Office, the congressional watchdog agency, asked Turner about the Pentagon-approved sale of \$1.2 billion in highly specialized radar aircraft (AWACS) to Iran. In response, Turner sent a highly publicized written reply that certain top-secret equipment on the aircraft could jeopardize U.S. security. Infuriated by this flanking attack, Defense Secretary Brown telephoned Brzezinski to say that none of the seven AWACS planes contained the top-secret equipment (a coding machine).

That's not all. Turner inherited a vast bureaucratic empire torn to shreds by repeated congressional investigations, by alleged confessions from ex-agents, by exploitation of politicians and by suspicions of allied intelligence agencies that it is no longer secure. Morale problems he inherited four months ago have lingered and even multiplied.

Critics of the admiral claim he wants control over NRO because clandestine operations in the old style are now passé, no longer productive and totally unacceptable to frightened politicians. Turner flatly denied that allegation to us. Although his own study of all present CIA undercover operations has produced some deficiencies, he added, it has revealed no major mistakes.

But the form taken by Turner's study of clandestine operations has produced new anger inside the CIA. Turner gave his proxy to a private management consultant named Robert D. (Rusty) Williams, with a \$47,500 government salary and carte blanche powers to hunt through the darkened closets of secret operations.

Fairly or not, Williams is now bitingly referred to as "super-sleuth" by old CIA hands, some of whom are convinced Turner means to name him to a permanent CIA job near the top.

Added to these morale problems was last week's leak that Turner had ousted longtime CIA professional Henry Knoche as deputy director. Turner told us he had nothing to do with the leak and deeply resented it. He wanted Knoche's departure—and that of perhaps many other senior officials—to await the President's final reorganization plan.

While not responsible, Turner was damaged by the leak—damage that reached into the Oval Office itself, where Jimmy Carter had often been heard to praise Knoche. Coincidentally, his first defeat on the bureaucratic reorganization followed soon after.

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